



## **Volunteer Retention Tips**

### **Produce a basic information pack for new volunteers containing**

- A copy of their role description and immediate points of contact (e.g. predecessor, people with whom they are most likely to work)
- Telephone numbers, email addresses, postal addresses
- Details of expenses that can be claimed back and how to claim them
- An overview of the organisation (e.g. management structure, summary of development plan) so they can see where they fit and the contribution they are making.

Don't assume that just because people have been involved in the organisation for some time, they know how everything works! It is safer to provide information that people don't need than to make assumptions about their level of knowledge.

### **Set Standards**

Most volunteers want to do a good job and will appreciate knowing what standards the organisation expects early on, rather than being told they are doing something wrong after the event.

Standards may include

- Commitment (and to say if they can't meet then, even in the short term)
- Extent and limits of their responsibility (especially in relation to financial matters, representing the organisation externally, or entering into agreements on behalf of the organisation)
- Child Protection policies and the organisations good practice guidelines for working with children
- Working relationships with others – respect other volunteers.

### **Practical Support**

The ideal way to introduce a volunteer to a new job is to encourage them to shadow their predecessor for a few months, with a gradual handover of responsibility. If this isn't possible, consider using:

- Somebody who has done the job before or who knows enough about the organisation to be able to offer some guidance and be at the other end of the phone.
- A mentor – somebody who can provide feedback as a new volunteer gets to grips with a job.
- A Volunteer Coordinator – make sure that they spend time with the new volunteer early on to check that everything is going according to plan.

## **Delegate Responsibility**

If your human resource planning has been good, you will have recruited a volunteer to a particular job because there is a real need for that job to be done – so trust them and let them get on with it. If people feel that responsibility lies with them, they are far more likely to do the job well, than if they feel they constantly have to refer back to somebody else. With standards appropriately set, people will understand the limitations of their responsibility and will be less likely to overstep the mark.

## **Avoid Duplication and Gaps**

Make sure that role descriptions are clearly defined to avoid two people working on the same task, leaving other aspects of their role unattended.

It might be necessary to reinforce role descriptions to make sure that people aren't extending the job into what they would like it to be, rather than the job that really needs to be done!

## **Value People's Time**

Wherever possible, arrange meetings to suit the needs of the majority of volunteers rather than a small minority.

Assess whether there is enough business to warrant a meeting. If a meeting is necessary (rather than just routine), start on time, work to a planned agenda, and finish on time.

Be realistic about when people are really needed. This will avoid wasting their time and therefore enable them to use their time more effectively.

## **Involvement**

Volunteers are an important part of your organisation. Try to ensure that you aren't only a top down organisation by encouraging volunteers to contribute to decision-making. They will be more comfortable about implementing policies or ideas that they have contributed to or been consulted about.

## **Teamwork**

Sport organisations have traditionally worked with committee structure. However, a team approach is much more effective. Use team strength both on and off the playing field; think about ways in which you can organise your volunteers into small working teams. This will provide

- A balance of skills, knowledge and experience
- Support for each member by the others
- Shared goals and targets
- Shared workload
- Opportunities to play different roles within the team, thus introducing an element of variety
- Opportunities to find substitutes where necessary
- Good leadership

## **Training**

Help people to develop the skills and knowledge they need to do their job.

Remember, training isn't just about formal courses. Volunteers can sometimes find the word 'training' off putting.

## **Team Meetings**

Holding regular team meetings is a good way to show that you are listening or regular one-ones with your volunteers are good to keep each other in touch with progress.

## **Listen**

Volunteer coordinators/team leaders should make time to listen to volunteers. It is important to

- Provide honest and constructive feedback
- Find out what aspects of the job they enjoy the most/the least
- Remember what got them involved in volunteering in the first place – are they getting what they wanted out of it?
- Assess whether they are managing to do the job in the time available or whether they need some help
- Decide whether the role description needs changing
- Discuss ideas for working smarter not harder
- Discuss other roles that they might like to take on in the future

## **Support**

There are times when life doesn't go strictly to plan. Allow for the fact that their voluntary role is only one small aspect of a persons life and that, sometimes, other things (e.g. work and family) demand 100% of their time. Volunteers should be able to take time out when necessary, without feeling as if they have let the organisation down. It's much better to find a substitute or some additional help for a short while, then to lose a good volunteer permanently.